



P.O. Box 1166
Kailua, Hawaii 96734

Fax: (808) 254-5552
Phone: (808) 254-5111 / (808) 254-0601

Monday, April 07, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Country of Origin Labeling Program
Agricultural Marketing Service
Stop 0249 Room 2092-SM
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0249

Re: Comments on Guidelines for Voluntary Country of Origin Labeling Program

Dear Secretary Veneman:

I am writing in response to your request for comments on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) "Guidelines for the Interim Voluntary Country of Origin Labeling of Beef, Lamb, Pork, Fish, Perishable Agricultural Commodities, and Peanuts" (hereinafter Voluntary COL Guidelines). I am the Chief Executive of Down to Earth Natural Foods. Down to Earth Natural Foods is a Hawaii six store chain of vegetarian natural foods stores in Hawaii.

As a food retailer, the law holds me responsible for informing consumers of the country of origin of all non-processed fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, and peanuts that are sold in our retail stores. Only my suppliers know the country of origin of these products. I cannot look at a hand of bananas and know whether it is from Costa Rica or Guatemala. **USDA must issue regulations that will hold suppliers responsible for giving me complete, accurate and verifiable information.**

Moreover, the requirement to keep two years of records at every retail store on the country of origin of every covered commodity is outrageous. Most of these perishable products are sold and consumed within a few days. As a relatively small retailer, I simply do not have the physical or electronic storage capacity to keep two years worth of records on the country of origin of every covered commodity in every store.

Please issue clear and reasonable regulations quickly that will allow me to comply with the law without putting me out of business or limiting my ability to continue to provide consumers with a fresh and abundant supply of food products.

Sincerely,

Mark Fergusson

Chief Executive & Chief Financial Officer